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THE OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN IN COURT ADMINISTRATION

BY MARY M. BARTELME,
Judge, Chicago Municipal Court.

Judge Merritt W. Pinckney of Chicago had been upon the bench of the juvenile court but a short time when he realized that in order to do justice to the delinquent girls, the greatest need was to have their cases heard by a woman. He found that a very large number of little girls under 18 years of age were brought in on the ground of some immorality; that often the culprit was a timid little first offender, if offender at all, who had no understanding of the character or possible results of her act; that she often had been assaulted by a man whom she did not know and whom very likely she would never see again; that many times the act left her with a disease for which she should have immediate and persistent treatment and perhaps isolation; and that her parents or custodian might have contributed to her delinquency. In four cases, all heard within six months, in which the parents insisted that their child had had intercourse with men and must be sent to the State Training School and the child as emphatically insisted she had not had such relations with men, it was found on examination by a woman physician that the statement of the child was true, and the parents' request was not complied with.

It was evident to Judge Pinckney that hearing the child's case in a large public court room presided over by a man, whose clerks were men, and whose other occupants were men, women and children waiting to have the cases in which they were interested heard, or perhaps mere curiosity seekers, was not conducive to secure the facts from the child, or to do justice to her. He therefore appointed a woman to hear the cases of girls charged with delinquency. The hearings are now held in a small room with none but women clerks and with as few "outsiders" present as possible, and consequently the hearings are more in the nature of a dignified family conference than a court trial. Under such conditions it is far easier to obtain

the confidence of and a true and full statement of facts from the girl, and only when these are obtained can justice be done.

Personally, I believe it is easier for a woman than a man to obtain a true statement of facts from a little girl who is charged with theft. She intuitively feels that a woman will better understand the taking of some face powder or articles of dress or finery she deems so necessary during the years when she feels fine plumage and good grooming are essential to her success in the "game" of securing the attentions of the other sex.

A girl must have recreation and above all she should experience those greatest of all joys and desires in a woman's life, wifehood and motherhood, and if the means and activities that lead up to these cannot be obtained under the most auspicious circumstances, still they must be obtained. The girl, too, feels a woman will understand when she tells her that she is one of a family of seven living in three rooms, the largest of which serves as kitchen, dining and living room, where meals are prepared, cooked and eaten, where father is resting his shoeless feet and babies are being gotten ready for bed; that she cannot entertain company in her home and therefore does meet "fellows" on the street corners, in the park or at the movie.

It is the realization on the part of a girl that a woman understands and feels her needs and desires that makes her throw aside her timidity and secretiveness, give to the woman judge her confidence, and relate to her her struggles, her opportunities and her lack of them.

The intimate relation which a woman has with home conditions, with all domestic relations and with the unfolding of the child's character, its needs, its longings, makes it possible for her to put herself in the child's place and to understand her.

Personally, I believe a woman of good judgment and legal training should be able to handle more efficiently and justly than a man the cases that arise in a juvenile court, morals court or a court of domestic relations.

The introduction of women upon the police force in some of our large cities is one of the best innovations that could be made for the betterment and protection of the ignorant, unthinking or delinquent girl, who in a public place of amusement or recreation is accosted or spoken to, or herself approaches and speaks to a boy or

man whom she has never seen before. The appearance of a woman police usually causes the disappearance of the boy and the escort of the girl to her home by a woman.

It may not always be pleasant for women to render such service but it is a duty they owe to the home and the family, which have a right to such service.